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Statement submitted by Ohaha Family Foundation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Our organization is engaging with Traditional and Religious mechanism to champion the advancement of access to social services to women and Girls, in Nigeria. Nigeria has a human population of 198 Million people, 100 Million Males (50.6 per cent) and 98 Million Females (49.4 per cent), having around 250 ethnic groups and over 500 indigenous languages.

The country is a religiously diverse society, so that traditional and religious systems and institutions are very central to the Nigerian people. Christianity and Islam are the two major religions practiced in Nigeria, with Christians dominating the south and Islam the north although there is still a good number of people in the country still practicing traditional religions. The traditional institutions are usually represented by the title of Emir's, Oba's, Igwe's, Obi's and Chiefs or the traditional title that the community inherited or are given; these leaders are highly revered by the people as custodians of the cultural norms, rights and responsibilities that the people live by, and their interpretation is strongly upheld. The religious leaders and clergies are the custodians of the religious rules and norms and practices, often the people hold their leaders highly as the mouthpiece of the Supreme Being.

Since inception of human habitation and civilization in Nigeria, traditional laws, and practices govern how people live, and interact with each other and access social services. Although these institutions and their leadership systems do not have any formal powers, yet they continue to be highly revered and respected by the people around their circle of influence. Their followers agree to a trans-generational hierarchy and system, which also give more credence to their sovereignty, because they have influence in their sphere of influence.

Culture and tradition are shaping the way people interact through the practice of religion impacting the design of religious places of worship, to accommodate gender disparity. Gender roles are very much engraved in traditional institutions, with gender specific roles and responsibility enshrined in cultural orientation. Say for instance, in orthodox Christianity, males don't seat with females in Churches and interaction is greatly reduced, while in Mosques, females do not pray together with their male counterparts, in some instances, male mosques is designed secluded from female mosques.

Typically, in the Nigeria society, women and girls have access to services as much as the 'societal norms' permit them and the males have higher dominance in the decision and leadership processes, so that a women or girl is often believed to be subjected to the male figure in her life, which could be father, brother and leader. The male counterparts or leaders do often not allow females participate or speak except admitted and permitted.

Traditional practices have been so male dominated that parents with female children only are believed to be weak, and lack strength as male children are believed to provide security for the family, the heir apparent to carry on the family name, thus bridge between generations. Fathers have been ostracized and demeaned for having or providing cover for women and girls, as it is believed in some traditional communities, because women and girls are relegated to domestic roles, and house chores. So that the males are usually favoured in placement, access to the services, and promotion and visibility. There are societies that women ae not allowed to speak in public when their male 'cover' is seated.

In order to ensure that there is improved and equal access to Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, we are recommending the following;

- Identify the traditional and religious leaders in communities practicing male dominance and, inform and educate the males on gender inclusiveness and the critical roles of women and girls while advocating for the advancement, and improvement of the participation of women and girls in such communities.
- Identify the male leaders whose support we can leverage upon to mobilize for the advancement of active participation and involvement of women and girls from the grassroots.
- Include women and girls in designing social services, through design, implementation and monitoring stages.
- Educate women and girls on improved roles in active participation and decision making, by ensuring that they are more available.
- Mobilize more parents and grassroots advocate to ensure that ALL girls receive compulsory primary and secondary education.
- Identify and galvanize support for inclusion and participation of women and girls through the favoured wife of the traditional ruler in community development; this champion could help bring women and girls closer to the seat of power and influence and thus bring about the needed change.
- Channel the power and influence of the women groups in communities to amplify the voice of women and girls.
- Women and girls are most vulnerable in times of disaster and crisis, using the traditional and religious mechanisms to build the resilience of women and girls.
- Increase women participation in community discussions, leaders and elders meeting and in the political ecosystem.
- Let women and girls lead through their male counterparts in traditional societies until women and girls grow in number for inclusive growth and development
- Increase the number of women and girls trained to offer and provide services that are male dominated.
- Build social protection and safety nets for women and girls by women and girls.
- There should be a mandatory 40–50 per cent of women participation as a key component in ALL services that will be offered.
- Member states should be encouraged to at Federal, State and Local Government Level increase women participation and inclusion in decision and policy making by allocated a certain number or quota of participation for women and girls.